ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

COMMERCIAL AND SPORT FISHERIES
MEMORANDUM

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FROM:
Management and Research Staff
Soldotna/Anchorage/Palmer

SUBJECT: UCI Pre-Season Management Strategy for 2003

Commercial Fisheries Division and Sport Fish Division staff met in Soldotna on May 7, 2003 and discussed 2003 Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) fishery management strategies.

Meeting Objectives

- Preview management strategies, tools, and criteria for sport, commercial, and personal use fisheries for the 2003 fishing season in UCI.
- Discuss data sharing, inseason projects and schedules for both.

Meeting Products

- List of inseason data and projections to be shared inseason.
- Schedule for data sharing, projections, and daily staff meetings.
- List of management tools and general criteria for inseason management for commercial and sport fisheries throughout UCI.

Participants

CF Staff: James Brady, Jeff Regnart, Brian Bue, Jeff Fox, Mark Willette, Suzanne Maxwell, Pat Shields, Dave Westerman, Bob Decino

SF Staff: Barry Stratton, Tom Vania, James Hasbrouck, Tim McKinley, Bruce King, Dave Rutz, Rich Yanusz, Nicky Szarzi, Matt Miller, Debby Burwen, Mark Gamblin, Larry Marsh.

Disclaimer

This document outlines the discussion between the Division of Commercial Fisheries staff and the Division of Sport Fish staff regarding UCI Pre-Season Management Strategy for 2003. This document was not edited for format, style or wording consistency.

Distribution

Staff, Public, Board of Fisheries Members.

Communication Protocols

Standards for Decision Making

Each fishery division makes assessments of run size, stock ID, fishery performance, and other measures of inseason performance for the particular fisheries and research projects for which they are responsible. Both fishery divisions have reviewed standard assessment methods used to manage salmon stocks in Upper Cook Inlet and agree that these methods are reasonable and reliable. As a result, both fishery divisions agree to honor the others' assessment methodologies and run assessments from projects they operate. Moreover, both fishery divisions are actively developing improved methods of inseason assessment.

Each fishery division makes management decisions as a result of the assessments for the fisheries for which they are responsible. In general, management decisions that directly affect either the commercial or recreational fishery will be made by the fishery division directly responsible for that fishery. For example, management decisions concerning early run Kenai River king salmon are made by Sport Fish Division (SF) staff because there is no commercial fishery that would be affected by these decisions.

To the extent possible, management decisions that directly affect both commercial and recreational fisheries will be made by the fishery division directly responsible for that fishery in consultation with the other fishery division. For example, management decisions concerning late run Kenai River king salmon are made by SF staff in consultation with Commercial Fish Division (CF) staff because restrictions to the king sport fishery could trigger management actions that affect the east side set net fishery. This memo serves to describe preseason management strategies that have been developed and discussed by both fishery divisions in direct consultation, to facilitate management decisions directly affecting commercial and sport fisheries once the season starts.

Inseason Communication of Assessments

Beginning some time after July 1 but before July 10, daily staff meetings will be held at 1:00 p.m. in the Soldotna office conference room. Meetings prior to July 1 will be held as necessary to communicate information relevant to both Divisions. Palmer SF staff will teleconference with the Soldotna meeting, as they deem necessary. A working notebook of materials will be updated daily and remain in the conference room so staff or the public can obtain copies of pertinent inseason data. Staff meetings will stress interpretation of data, rationale behind fishery decisions, discussions of management strategies for future decisions; possible anticipated problems, review of run to date, etc. The primary purpose of the staff meetings is to share and discuss fishery and assessment information, and determine data needs for possible future fisheries decisions. To facilitate rapid sharing of inseason information, all staff will have access to the SF Intranet site. CF staff will be given a user-id and password prior to the season so that all management and research staff can post and interpret each division's assessments.

Information Provided by Commercial Fisheries Division

Standard Assessments

Commercial fisheries escapement data from its four sonar sites (Kenai, Kasilof, Yentna, and Crescent) are generally ready at 10:00 a.m. On days following a fishing period processor reports of catch are finalized by approximately 1:00 p.m. Offshore test fish (OTF) indices are generally available by 11:00 a.m. Age, weight and length (AWL) data summaries are distributed as they are processed (after commercial openings, as samples accumulate from escapement projects, etc.). Updates are prepared every two to three days. At critical points in the fishery AWL reports are provided on request. Mark Willette (or CF designee) will respond to in-season research data requests and will be responsible for projections of inriver returns, OEGs, SEGs and BEGs of sockeye salmon in the Kasilof, Kenai, Yentna, and Crescent rivers. Pat Shields will respond to all questions regarding catch data, offshore test fish data, and emergency orders. Pat will include a synopsis of conditions, outlooks, and rationale with the emergency order email. The target audiences for these emails are department staff familiar with fishery management and will not have the EO/ADA statement required for public distribution. Actual emergency orders and news releases will be posted on the Central Region CF Internet site.

The OTF Program provides important early in-season information regarding total UCI sockeye salmon run strength. Six stations are fished daily near the southern line of the Central District. OTF index catches are expanded to total run size based on the historical relationship between commercial catch rates, OTF indices, and seasonal run timing. This year, due to fishing schedules, a reasonable estimate of the total UCI return strength will first occur on July 22. An estimate of the total return to the Kenai River generally will not be possible until one period later on July 25 due to fish getting to the Yentna for sampling. This projection will be updated daily after the July 25 estimate or as needed.

Commercial CPUE or catch performance graphs are prepared after Central District drift gillnet and Northern District set gillnet fishing periods. In general, current year data are overlaid on recent (10-15 years) historic data or compared against a subset of years with similar run strengths. When developed, graphs will be shared at staff meetings, placed in the conference room notebook, and placed on the SF intranet.

Information Provided by Sport Fish Division

Standard Assessments

Kenai River king sonar estimates, Kenai River king salmon creel data, and weir passage information (Russian River, Deep Creek, Ninilchik River, Deshka River, Fish Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Wasilla Creek, and Little Susitna River) will be posted for staff by 10:00 a.m. on the SF Intranet site and made available to the public on the internet daily. Estimates of the catch and projections of total Kenai River king salmon escapements will be posted Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each week by 11:00 a.m. beginning July 11. A subdirectory on the SF Intranet will also include data or observations concerning the Kenai River PU dip net fishery, predictions of the sport harvest above RM 19, a summary of sockeye passage at the Kenai River king salmon sonar site, and CPUE data for sockeye and king salmon in the Kenai River king

netting study. Larry Marsh or Mark Gamblin will respond to sport fish data requests for the Kenai Peninsula, Dave Rutz for Northern Cook Inlet and the west side north from Tuxedni Bay, Matt Miller for the Anchorage area including Turnagain Arm and Nicky Szarzi for the Westside south of Tuxedni Bay. Questions regarding Kenai king salmon assessment should be directed to Tim McKinley.

Kenai River coho salmon are assessed by monitoring annual smolt production, total harvest, and the relationship between the two. A sample of smolt has been captured, tagged, and released annually since 1992 and has served the dual-purpose of estimating annual smolt production and the population-specific harvest in commercial fisheries. The Statewide Harvest Survey has provided estimates of the inriver sport and personal-use harvest. Combining harvest estimates from all sources has provided an estimate of the total annual harvest of Kenai River coho salmon from 1993 through 2000.

Distribution of Information

Generally, paper copies of in-river counts, OTF, and catch data are placed on the desk of each CF biologist, the SF research project leader, and SF Area Management Biologist in Soldotna as they become available and placed at the counter for the public. When all data items are available CF also distributes them via email to interested staff of both divisions across the state and places them in a directory on the SF Intranet. Estimates of abundance, catch, and in-river count graphs are distributed at staff meetings following full-district or Northern District fishing periods, and will be placed on the SF Intranet at that time. All recreational fishery information will be posted on the SF Intranet daily and paper copies of pertinent information may be provided at daily staff meetings. In-river counts (SF and CF) and catches (CF) are also available on the ADF&G web site.

Management Strategies for the 2003 Season

Early Run King and Sockeye Salmon

Northern District King Outlook

The Department does not forecast most northern-bound king salmon stocks. However, a forecast for the 2003 season is available for the Deshka River. A strong chinook salmon run is expected at the Deshka River in 2003, with a total run forecast of 41,000 fish. The current escapement goal is 13,000 to 28,000 fish. The commercial fishery will open for three periods beginning on May 26. The commercial fishery will be managed as in 5 AAC 21.366.

Early Run Kenai River King Outlook

The preseason outlook for early run Kenai River king salmon in 2003 is for an average return. Using a model of sibling returns and stock/recruitment information, total return is anticipated be approximately 13,000 fish. The current escapement goal is 7,200 to 14,400 fish.

Early Run Russian River Sockeye Outlook

No formal forecast is prepared for early run Russian River sockeye salmon. The escapement goal for this stock is 14,000 to 37,000 fish past the weir (5 AAC 21.361). Based on recent return performance of this stock (escapements of 34,000 to 86,000 fish in the past five years), an above average run is anticipated. In 2002 the sanctuary area was opened (a liberalization) the same day as the regular fishery (June 15).

Strategy for Management of the Commercial Fishery

Big River Commercial Fishery

The Big River set gillnet fishery for sockeye salmon will be managed according to the Big River Sockeye Salmon Management plan (5 AAC 21.368). The fishery will open the Kustatan Subdistrict June 2 for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday weekly fishing periods. This fishery will close if the harvest of king salmon reaches 1,000 fish prior to the regulatory closure date of June 24. Inseason regulatory actions for sockeye salmon are not anticipated.

Strategy for Management of the Sport Fishery

Northern District King Salmon

Westside Susitna king salmon fisheries were liberalized by regulatory actions taken at the 2002 Board of Fisheries meeting. Most Westside Susitna systems now have a 2 fish possession limit and bait is allowed in the Deshka River beginning June 8. Additionally, Eastside Susitna king salmon fisheries may be liberalized with additional fishing day(s) added to the fishery. This decision is generally made during the last week of June based on recreational catch rates and aerial surveys. A boat survey is conducted on Willow Creek a day or two after the scheduled closure, if it is determined that we will exceed the upper end of the escapement goal we will open select eastside tributaries for an additional three day weekend. The Deshka River may also be liberalized if at the 25 percentile of the run we project we will be within 125% of the high end or the escapement goal range.

Early Run Kenai River King Salmon

Early run Kenai River king salmon will be managed according to the Kenai River Early-Run King Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 56.070). Given the anticipated total return of 13,000 fish and an anticipated harvest of approximately 3,500 fish (based upon an exploitation rate of 27% with the slot limit), no fishery restrictions are anticipated. However, this fishery and stock are monitored closely and a decision regarding restriction of the fishery, if necessary, would likely occur in early to mid June. Any decision to liberalize the fishery would likely happen around this same time frame or a little later.

Early Run Russian River Sockeye Salmon

Given the outlook described above, it is anticipated that any management action required in this fishery would be a liberalization. Liberalizations in the past have included opening the sanctuary area at the confluence of the Russian and Kenai Rivers, and/or bag limit increases. The fishery

will open by regulation on June 15. Generally, by June 20 a decision can be made as to whether the escapement goal will be exceeded and the sanctuary area can be opened. However, in 2002 the sanctuary was opened the same day as the regular fishery.

UCI Sockeye Salmon

Outlook

A run of 3.9 million sockeye salmon is forecasted to return to Upper Cook Inlet in 2003, with a projected harvest of 2.4 million sockeye salmon, see 2003 forecast and Upper Cook Inlet 2003 Outlook For Commercial Salmon Fishing for more complete descriptions.

Strategy for Management of the Commercial Sockeye Fishery

Upper Subdistrict Set Gillnet

Kasilof Section

- The Kasilof Section opens on the first regular period on or after June 25.

- From June 25 through July 7 the department may not allow more than 48 hours of additional fishing time by EO per week (Sunday through Saturday) and must close the fishery for 48 consecutive hours per week

- Beginning July 8 the Kasilof Section will be managed in combination with the Kenai and East Forelands Sections.

- From July 8 through July 20, or until an assessment of Kenai run strength has been made, the department may not allow more than 24 hours of additional fishing time by E.O. per week (Sun through Sat) in the Kasilof Section. There are no mandatory window closures until an assessment above 2 million Kenai River sockeye occurs.

- If necessary, the department may limit regular and additional fishing time to within ½ mile of shore in the Kasilof Section if the Kenai and East Forelands Sections are not open for the fishing period.

- If the Kenai run strength is under 2 million and the department determines that the Kasilof River 300,000 OEG may be exceeded, the department may allow 24 hours of additional fishing time per week after July 15 within ½ mile of shore in the Kasilof Section.

- Beginning July 20 or after a Kenai run strength assessment is made:

    - If the Kenai assessment is **less than 2 million Kenai sockeye,** there will be no more than 24 hours of additional fishing time per week in the Kasilof Section. If the Kenai and East Forelands Sections are not fished during regular or additional openings, the department may limit regular and additional periods in the Kasilof Section to ½ mile of shore. There are no mandatory window closures.

- If the Kenai assessment is **between 2 and 4 million Kenai sockeye**, the department may allow up to 36 hours of additional fishing time per week and will close the Upper Subdistrict for 48 consecutive hours per week. If the Kenai and East Forelands Sections are not open, the department may limit regular and extra periods in the Kasilof Section to within ½ mile of shore.
- If the Kenai assessment is for a return of **more than 4 million Kenai sockeye**, the department may allow up to 60 hours of additional fishing time per week and will close the Upper Subdistrict for 36 consecutive hours per week. If the Kenai and East Forelands Sections are not fished, the department may limit regular and extra periods in the Kasilof Section to within ½ mile of shore.
- The Kasilof Section set gillnet fishery will close no later than August 7.
- From August 1 to August 7, regardless of the size of the sockeye return to the Kenai River, the department is limited to no more than one E.O. not to exceed 24 hours in duration.

Kenai and East Forelands Sections

- The Kenai and East Forelands Sections open on or after July 8, the first regular period in 2003 will be July 10.

- From July 8 through July 20, or until an assessment of Kenai run strength has been made, the department may not allow more than 24 hours of additional fishing time by E.O. per week.

- Beginning July 20, or after a Kenai run strength assessment is made:

    - If the Kenai assessment is **less than 2 million Kenai sockeye**, there will be no more than 24 hours of additional fishing time per week in the Kenai and East Forelands Sections. There are no mandatory window closures.
    - If the Kenai assessment is **between 2 and 4 million Kenai sockeye**, the department may allow up to 36 hours of additional fishing time per week and will close the Kenai and East Forelands Sections for 48 consecutive hours per week.
    - If the Kenai assessment is for a return of **more than 4 million Kenai sockeye**, the department may allow up to 60 hours of additional fishing time per week and will close the Kenai and East Forelands Sections for 36 consecutive hours per week.
    - The set gillnet fishery in the Kenai and East Forelands Sections will close no later than August 7.
    - From August 1 to August 7, regardless of the size of the sockeye return to the Kenai River, the department is limited to no more than one E.O. not to exceed 24 hours in duration.

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery

- There will be one regular period restricted to the Kenai and Kasilof Sections between July 9 and July 15. This will either be on July 10 or July 14 in 2003.

- Between July 16 and July 31 the department will restrict two consecutive drift gillnet periods to either or both of the following areas: (1) the Kenai and Kasilof Sections; and/or, (2) that portion of the Central District south of Kalgin Island. The area south of Kalgin Island may be used when necessary in returns when the Kenai sockeye run strength is approaching 3 million or there are Kenai king salmon concerns which may prevent fishing by set gillnets in the Upper Subdistrict. When fisheries are restricted to achieve an escapement goal such as in the Yentna River during the last decade, the fishery will re-open even if the escapement goal is not achieved once the stocks that were being protected have exited the fishery and are no longer available for harvest at significant levels. This action would likely occur after July 25 on an average run timing year.
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- If the sockeye return is greater than three million and the department restricts the periods immediately before or on July 25 and after July 25 then the area described in the "Upper Cook Inlet 2002 Outlook For Commercial Salmon Fishing" in Figure 2 may be added to the other open area during these restricted periods.

- If the sockeye return is greater than four million for the fishing period immediately after July 25, the entire Central District normally open to drifting may be open to fishing. If this occurs, only one regular period restriction from July 16 to July 31 may actually occur.

- The season closes on August 9 so the last regular period is August 7 and there is no experimental pink salmon fishery after August 9 in odd years.

Season Opening dates

Season opening dates for the various fisheries around the inlet are as follows:

Big River Fishery: June 2 and continuing through June 23 unless the 1,000 king salmon harvest limit is reached prior to that date. Weekly fishing periods are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with a 1,800-foot separation between nets.

Northern District King Salmon Fishery: May 26. There will be no more than three fishing periods; the remaining two periods are scheduled on June 2 and June 9. In that area from one mile south of the Theodore River to the Susitna River there is only one open period during this fishery, which will occur on June 2 in 2003. Weekly fishing periods are on Mondays only, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. with a single 35 fathom set gillnet per permit and a 1,200 foot separation between nets.

Western Subdistrict Set Net Fishery: June 16

Drift and all remaining set gillnet fisheries except the Upper Subdistrict: June 26. The drift season will close August 9. One of the drift fishing periods scheduled for July 10 or July 14 will be limited by E.O. to the Kenai and Kasilof Sections only. Two consecutive periods between July 16 and July 31 will also be restricted as described above. Further restrictions by emergency order may also occur.

Upper Subdistrict Set Net Fishery: June 26 for the Kasilof Section (that portion south of the

Blanchard Line). The Kenai and East Forelands Sections (that portion north of the Blanchard Line) will open July 10. All sections of the Upper Subdistrict will close for the season on August 7.

Experimental Drift Gillnet Pink Salmon Fishery: Will not occur in 2003.

Strategy for Management of the Sockeye Salmon Sport Fishery

Kenai River Sockeye Salmon

In the Kenai River, sockeye salmon in-river run is monitored by sonar in the main stem of the Kenai River at river mile 19. Main stem recreational fisheries for late-run sockeye salmon are managed under provisions of the Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.360).

The 2003 in-river goal is 750,000 – 950,000 salmon past the sonar at river mile 19. The OEG is 500,000 – 1,000,000 sockeye salmon - this is the number of sockeye salmon past the sonar at river mile 19 minus the sockeye salmon sport harvest upstream of the sonar. If it is determined late in July that the Kenai River inriver return is projected to be less than 600,000 fish, sport fishery restrictions could be implemented to assure that the minimum 500,000 sockeye salmon OEG goal is achieved. Restrictive management actions in the recreational fisheries have typically been enacted in concert with commercial actions and are designed to provide for additional conservation of Kenai River sockeye salmon stocks. In the mainstem of the Kenai River, the daily bag and possession limit for sockeye salmon is 3 fish unless the total return projection on July 25 for Kenai River sockeye is over 2 million, at which time the bag limit may be increased by E.O. to 6 fish. Restrictive management actions in the recreational fishery on or after July 25 could include reduction in daily bag and possession limits and/or restrictions by time and area, or closure.

Late-run Russian River Sockeye Salmon

The late-run sockeye salmon fishery in the Russian River and at its' confluence with the Kenai River are managed for an escapement goal of 33,000 – 121,000 under provisions of the Russian River Sockeye Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.361). Escapement of sockeye is monitored at the Russian River weir. No formal forecast of late run Russian River sockeye salmon is made, but it is anticipated that returns to the Russian River weir will approximate the recent five year average of ~90,000 fish. If restrictions or liberalizations to this fishery are necessary, they would likely occur during late July or early August. If it is projected inseason that the escapement will exceed the upper end of the escapement range, the bag and possession limit may be increased to 6 fish.

Susitna River Sockeye Salmon

Recreational harvests of sockeye salmon are incidental to harvests of other fish species. Recreational fishery restrictions in the Susitna River drainage are not likely to be implemented even if the lower end (90,000 sockeye salmon) of the escapement goal is not achieved. The total Sport harvest from the Susitna River is about 6,000 sockeye salmon. This harvest is fairly proportional between East and Westside Susitna River tributaries at about 3,000 per system. Of

the 3,000 fish harvested from Westside Susitna streams, the Yentna River accounts for about 2,500 of the harvest. Sockeye escapement into the Susitna River is monitored based on a sonar count at mile 7 of the Yentna River. Based on historical count information, it is thought that the Yentna River makes up about 48% of the total sockeye salmon return to the Susitna River.. Most of the sport harvest in the entire Susitna River drainage occurs prior to July 25th, which is at, or prior to the 75th percentile of the return to the Yentna River. Much of the sport harvest of sockeye salmon occurs below the sonar counter on the Yentna River and the location of the historical counter that used to be in operation on the Susitna River. Few targeted sockeye salmon sport fisheries occur on the Susitna River drainage. With the exception of Lake Creek and Larsen Creek, nearly all of the sockeye salmon caught are caught incidentally when fishing for other salmon species. Additionally, many of the bright coho salmon that are caught by anglers are misreported as sockeye salmon. For these reasons, it is likely that any restrictions, less a complete closure prior to July 13th (50 percentile of the run) would provide little savings in terms of sockeye salmon going un-harvested by the sport fishery. Without an early indication of a disastrous run, even a complete closure would not be very effective.

Strategy for Management of the Personal Use Fishery

Fish Creek Sockeye Salmon: Closed

Kenai River Sockeye Salmon

The Kenai River personal use dip net fishery is open from July 10 through July 31 from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. each day. If it is determined that the sockeye salmon return will not achieve the lower end of the 500,000-1,000,000 OEG this fishery would be closed in conjunction with a restriction to the sport fishery. If the total return projection on July 25 for Kenai River sockeye exceeds 2 million, the hour restrictions on dip netting may be lifted (i.e. dipnetting 24 hours a day). No additional action would be taken toward this fishery regarding conservation of coho salmon beyond those specified in the Kenai River Coho Salmon Conservation Management Plan (5 AAC 21.357).

Kasilof River Sockeye Salmon

A sockeye salmon sonar enumeration project is conducted on the Kasilof River. The Kasilof dip net fishery is open 24 hours per day from June 25 to August 7. The Kasilof personal use gillnet fishery is open June 15 to June 24 from 6AM to 11PM each day. If it is projected that the Kasilof sockeye salmon OEG of 150,000-300,000 fish will not be achieved these fisheries will be closed by emergency order.

Late Run Kenai River King Salmon

Outlook

The forecast for the 2003 season is approximately 53,000 king salmon. It is anticipated that approximately 8,000 fish will be harvested in the Deep Creek marine fishery and the commercial fishery, leaving an inriver return of approximately 45,000. An in-river harvest of approximately

13,000 fish is anticipated, putting about 32,000 fish into the escapement.

Strategy for Management of the Commercial Fishery

Given the current forecast for Kenai River sockeye (2.0 million) and the forecast for Kenai River King (55,000), closure of the Upper Subdistrict set net fishery and drifters in the setnet area is unlikely.

Strategy for Management of the Sport Fishery

The late run Kenai River king salmon fishery is managed under provisions of the Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.359) and the Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.360). Sonar at river mile 9 is used to estimate passage of king salmon into the Kenai River. A creel survey is used in-season to estimate recreational catch, harvest and effort. A mean run timing model is used to project total in-river return. The late run king salmon management plan calls for a BEG range of from 17,800 to 35,700 king salmon. Typically, escapement projections are sufficiently accurate by July 20 to provide the basis for in-season management actions. The return is forecast to be average to above average and the escapement is anticipated to be about 32,000 fish. If the run returns as forecasted and the harvest rates are as anticipated, in-season restrictions to this fishery are not likely. However, restrictive actions would be considered if the projected escapement was below 17,800 king salmon. These restrictions would most likely occur within the July 20 to July 31 time period when projections of harvest indicate that the escapement is at or below 17,800 fish. Restrictive management actions could consist of restricting the use of bait and/or combinations of restrictions by time and area. By regulation, the late run king salmon fishery will not be extended into August.

Coho Salmon

General Inseason Assessment Tools and Outlook

Coho salmon will be caught in the OTF project and drift gillnet fishery beginning around July 10. In general the coho salmon OTF project catches correlate with commercial drift catch per unit effort information but not with passage information gained from Northern Cook Inlet tributaries streams. While drift CPUE information is our best assessment tool in-season, it can only be used to determine very weak and very large returns.. OTF project coho salmon catch information does not provide a good tool for in-season abundance assessment. CF and SF staff will continue to work on these data to refine the methods and estimates of run strength for pink, chum, and coho salmon.

Weirs will be operated at Russian River, Little Susitna River, Fish Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Wasilla Creek, Ship Creek, and the Deshka River for coho salmon enumeration during the 2003 season. Enumeration of coho salmon at each of these sites except the Deshka River occurs too late in the season to use the information for in-season management. In the Deshka River the 25% point in the run appears to occur at the weir on August 3 and the halfway point occurs on August 9.

Strategy for Management of the Commercial Coho Salmon Fishery

The department manages the commercial fishery in UCI to minimize the harvest of Northern District and Kenai River coho salmon through stipulations in various fishery management plans. The measure of our success is the frequency of inriver restrictions of sport fisheries. These stipulations in management plans have been put in place to pass more coho salmon through to the Northern District and Kenai River to provide for sport fisheries.

The department will not restrict regular periods in UCI unless escapement indices or other abundance indices for king, sockeye, coho, chum, or pink salmon are below sustained yield objectives. These indices may be CPUE data, sonar counts, or other indicators as appropriate. A biological justification is needed to close or restrict a regular period. The department is not targeting a stock or minimizing coho or king harvests during regular periods. Regular periods are allocations given to the commercial fishery through the Board process and not subject to Emergency Order adjustments for anything other than biological reasons. The department will not restrict a regular period even if coho salmon are expected to be the most abundant species.

The department will take into account coho salmon run strength before allowing the drift gillnet fleet to fish south of Kalgin Island or in the "Box" during the regular periods near July 25 (for a description of the box see figure 2 in the "Upper Cook Inlet 2003 Outlook For Commercial Salmon Fishing"). A mixture of criteria will be evaluated to determine, if, and if so, how many hours or periods and how much area below Kalgin Island or in the "Box" may be utilized for drift gillnet fishing during the two restricted regular periods near July 25. Fishing south of Kalgin would not be allowed if coho salmon would thereafter require widespread, in-river restrictions. CF and SF would need to judge that the general pattern of drift coho CPUE is sufficient to provide for goals and in-river harvests. Other combinations and criteria are also possible.

The use of the drift fleet in the Kenai and Kasilof sections during August when set gillnets can't fish by regulation (Kenai River Coho Salmon Conservation Management Plan 5 AAC 21.357) is one management option that has not been used to date, and given the sockeye salmon forecast in 2003, it is not likely to be used in 2003. The commercial fishery in late July will be managed to achieve the in-river July 31 sockeye target, as has been the practice since 2000. If additional fishing time is required in early August in the Upper Subdistrict this fishing time will likely occur in the first few days of August with both gear types.

Strategy for Management of the Coho Salmon Sport Fishery

Kenai Peninsula

Coho salmon fisheries in drainages of the Kenai Peninsula are not monitored on an in-season basis. The BOF reduced bag and possession limits for coho salmon from 3 to 2 fish daily for most road accessible systems throughout UCI during the February 2000 meeting in Anchorage. Given these recently enacted conservation measures, no in-season management actions will likely be taken to either liberalize or restrict recreational coho salmon fisheries on the Kenai Peninsula during the 2003 season.

Northern Cook Inlet

Typically, Northern Cook Inlet recreational coho salmon fisheries are not liberalized. During 1997 and 1999 restrictions were implemented in the Little Susitna River and Knik Arm streams. Restrictions were based on commercial catch rates and in-river recreational harvest rates. No action is anticipated in Knik Arm streams during the 2003 season, as harvest potential is low. A two fish daily bag limit is in effect and Cottonwood, Wasilla, and Fish creeks are only open on weekends for 12 hours per day. Weirs will be operated on all these systems to provide enumeration of the escapement. Restrictive action is also unlikely in the Little Susitna River given the recent regulatory change to a two fish daily bag limit.

Strategy for Management of the Commercial Pink and Chum Salmon Fishery

Pink Salmon Management Plan

A new experimental pink fishery was created by the BOF during even years only. There will not be a fishery in 2003.

UCI Chum Salmon

Chum salmon are not harvested to an appreciable degree in the Upper Subdistrict. The Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye and Northern District Salmon management plans stipulate that no additional fishing shall be given to the drift gillnet fishery outside the Kasilof and Kenai Sections until a significant harvestable surplus of chum salmon is available. In future years the PIT project could be used to identify a harvestable surplus. The department will not restrict regular periods in UCI unless escapement indices or other abundance indices for king, sockeye, coho, chum, and pink salmon are below sustained yield objectives. These indices may be CPUE data, sonar counts, or other indicators as appropriate. A biological justification is needed to close or restrict a regular period. The department is not targeting a stock (chum salmon) or minimizing coho or king harvests during regular periods. Regular periods are allocations given to the commercial fishery through the Board process and not subject to Emergency Order adjustments for anything other than biological reasons.

Strategy for Management of the Pink and Chum Salmon Sport Fishery

UCI Pink and Chum Salmon

Recreational fisheries for chum and pink salmon are not managed on an in-season basis in Cook Inlet. Catch and harvest levels are low relative to abundance as anglers target king, coho and sockeye salmon. Pink salmon and chum salmon are enumerated at existing weir sites. Of specific interest is the enumeration of pink salmon through the Deshka weir and chum salmon through the Little Susitna River weir. Additionally, chum salmon are enumerated by aerial survey in some West Cook Inlet streams.